PLANNING AND PLOTTING THE YEAR AHEAD

Ahhhh! It's a sound heard 'cross the commonwealth this time of year as library board after library board breathes a sigh of relief. For most, two large tasks have just been completed—the annual evaluation of the director and the adoption of the budget. Many can add recruiting new trustees as well.

As the new fiscal year approaches perhaps it is time to make some new year's resolutions as a public library trustee. Consider, for example, planning the board's business so that you don't find yourselves overloaded with too many duties at one time. A clever way to do this is to use the Twelve-Month Agenda.

The Twelve–Month Agenda is a written plan for the board that allows you to anticipate important items of business and to be prepared for them. An added bonus is that it also allows you to schedule those without imposed deadlines so as to spread out the workload evenly over the course of a year. And it serves as a reminder to do those things that keep getting tabled for another time when there is more time.

What should be included on this agenda? Here's a generic laundry list, but each board will have its own issues to address:

- receive proposed budget
- vote on budget
- evaluate director
- elect new officers (must be done every two years)
- send trustee nominations to KDLA (taxing districts)
- review board policies
- review personnel policies
- review operational policies
- review long-range plan
- review insurance
- tour library
- visit branches

A sample of the Twelve-Month Agenda is included in this publication. Of course yours doesn't have to be on this form, but many librarians and trustees have found it helpful. The whole board participates in plotting out their tasks for the coming year and in committing to following it. A copy is usually given to each trustee to keep with his/her library board files so everyone will know what is being discussed when.

This concept applies equally well if done on a calendar year or a board's term year. It's provided here to help; so make it work for you.

ISSUES FOR BOARDS

One big surprise for most trustees upon starting their career as a board member is the number of laws and regulations they are expected to follow. Not every issue confronting a library board, however, is addressed in statute or regulation. Many are determined by local board policy and more than should be are based on tradition. One that has few right or wrong expectations is what information is given to the board each month and in what format. Here is where truly a fine line between micromanaging and accountability frequently manifests itself. One is to be avoided; the other embraced.

What does *your* board want to know about library business? One item is obvious. A quick survey of Kentucky's public libraries found that 92% receive some form of circulation report each month. While everyone knows that circulation is not the only measure of library business, it is still an important one— and especially so if the report format allows trustees to see more than just the current month's book activity.

The last two issues of the *Kentucky Public Library Newsletter* have featured articles on circulation. One lamented the decline experienced by over half of the nation's libraries and the other featured a glowing exception to this disturbing trend. Obviously, circulation is a measuring stick all can understand and an item of concern to many. So, what are your circulation reports telling you?

Just as with financial reports, the library director has an obligation to trustees to provide reports that give you the information you are seeking in ways that are meaningful. There are no mandated or even recommended forms for Kentucky public libraries. Each is free to design its own but to be useful, they must provide certain statistics. And not in a vacuum, either.

Circulation numbers mean very little unless they are compared to something else. Does your report compare the current month to the previous one? Or this month to the same month last year? Or, even better, use both comparisons? What about cumulative or running totals for the fiscal year?

If the library has branches, are you seeing the numbers for each branch as well as a system wide total? For libraries without branches, this means the bookmobile or whatever outreach service is provided.

How detailed is the book count? Most libraries report four categories: Adult Fiction, Adult Nonfiction, Juvenile Fiction, and Juvenile Nonfiction. Anything more is usually too much and serves to cloud the report.

What else should be counted? While that determination will vary from library to library, a generic standard includes: magazines; audio books; music tapes/CDs; videos; microfilm; CD-ROMs/computer software; equipment; reference transactions; computer usage; Internet usage; database usage; interlibrary loan usage; programs and attendance, often separated into adult and children; new cards issued (or customers registered); meeting room use; and traffic count of people using the library.

One final word of advice: all these numbers can be a maze worthy of Lewis Carroll's imagination or a neatly packaged one-page spreadsheet as prepared by Felix Unger. To readily see what's been going on in the library during the past month, demand the neat format. If you'd like samples of good, easy-to-follow reports, contact your regional librarian or the editor of this publication. Both print and electronic versions are available. And, don't worry that you're asking too much; your library has to report all this on the Annual Report anyway.

MAXIMIZING MEETING TIME

As discussed on the previous page, circulation statistics, while common practice in most libraries, are optional reports. Any library board may require its director to provide other reports that it deems necessary on a periodic basis. Some directors furnish information they feel will be helpful to the board without being instructed to do so. So, what should a trustee expect to receive at each monthly meeting?

Obviously the two required reports—the minutes of the previous meeting and the financial report—are givens. Most libraries will add a circulation report. Many will include a written director's report that briefly describes the highlights of the previous month, including such items as meetings attended, grants written, staff development issues, programs offered, technology issues, etc. This is also where many directors choose to alert board members to situations that will require some thought before reasonable decisions can be reached—a kind of advance notice.

Additional reports that go to trustees, while not quite as common as those listed above, include: brief descriptions for the children's and youth services personnel about their activity; similar reports from the bookmobile/outreach staff; branch activity reports; acquisitions and processing statistics; and anything else a particular board has asked to be given.

Sounds like a lot of information to receive, understand, and possibly take action. Yes, it is. And this is why effective and efficient library boards request as much of this information as possible be mailed to them prior to the meeting. This gives everyone time to read, re-read, and devote some serious thinking to the issues.

A clever director will not only provide a comprehensive board meeting packet, but will make the extra effort of highlighting those parts that are unique, questionable, or otherwise destined for discussion. One obvious example would be in the itemized listing of checks that each board is required by statute [KRS 173.360; 173.540; 173.755] to approve. This past winter's utility bills and the bookmobile's gasoline bills, both of which put most libraries over budget in those categories, would have been obvious choices to highlight with a colorful marker.

One last but very important item to include is the upcoming meeting's agenda. It provides a clue as to how long the meeting is likely to last—though that is no guarantee—but only if it lists the specifics of unfinished business and new business. Listing these also provides some "think time" for the trustees on items that may not be covered in the director's report. Finally, it gives your regional librarian an advance alert so he/she can come to your meeting with background information, samples, etc.

Even on a small scale, it pays to plan.

LIBRARY LETTERS

Dear Marian Librarian,

I was recently elected President of the library board and am concerned to discover that the library director opens my mail. Should she be doing that? PS: The previous president, who is still on the board, said he didn't mind.

-- Troubled Trustee

Dear Troubled,

That is totally up to you. Some presidents, as your board's former one indicates, don't mind and even request the director open their mail. They usually expect to be called if it is anything that requires immediate attention. Others strongly disagree, wishing to be notified when they have mail and expecting to get it unopened. This is not a board decision, but an individual one. Each time a new president is elected, the director should ask his/her preference.

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HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW?

The following quiz will let you test your knowledge on the topics covered in this publication. The answers are under "Publications" on KDLA's web page **<www.kdla.net>**.

1. What tool can prod trustees to remember to follow through on those well intended plans to review all policies annually?

2. Our current circulation report is not all that helpful. How can we change it?

3. Who decides what reports are given to trustees?

4. How detailed should the monthly meeting agenda be?

5. I thought board presidents didn't make decisions without board approval, so how come I alone get to decide who opens official mail.

1.   **What tool can prod trustees to remember to follow through on those well intended plans to review policies annually?** *[pg 1]*

The Twelve-Month Agenda is designed to do just that—along with helping you to spread your annual workload over the year. Some things must be done at specific times, like adopting the annual operating budget. Others need to be done periodically (which usually means annually) but often get tabled time after time. Reviewing policies, insurance coverage, long-range plans, etc can be scheduled during the "slow" months. PS: It's probably not a smart idea to schedule much of anything during the December meeting. Experience shows that everyone is in a hurry and not prone to focus long on serious subjects just before the holidays.

2.   **Our current circulation report is not that helpful. How can we change it?** *[pg 2]*

First of all, tell your director that you're not satisfied with what you're currently receiving. Blame T³ if you want. Discuss what items you'd like to see tracked and what kind of comparisons you'd like to have provided. Your director may be guilty of just continuing the same report he/she inherited years ago. Times have changed, library usage has changed, and it's probably way past due for the circ report to change as well. Your regional librarian can provide you with samples from other libraries. Steal what you like. Finally, you can contact the editor of T³ (see box on page 3) and request samples.

3.   **Who decides what reports are given to trustees?** *[pg 3]*

Ideally it's a joint decision. But always remember the Board of Trustees is the boss. The director works for you.   It is not only your right, but also your responsibility, to demand (but please start with a request) whatever information you need to do your job. Just like a successful marriage, communication is the key. Tell your director what you need—then make sure you get it.

4.   **How detailed should the monthly meeting agenda be?** *[pg 3]*

Like Goldilocks, not too much, not too little, but just right. A sample of too little detail is one that merely lists "Old Business" and "New Business" without any topics to be discussed. Most errors are on the side of too little detail. A sample of too much detail is one that fuses the director's report and the agenda by cluttering the agenda with descriptive information about each topic. A sample agenda can be found on page 34 of the Kentucky Public Library Trustee Manual *and is a good model to follow.*

5.   **I thought board presidents didn't make decisions without board approval, so how come I alone get to decide who opens official mail?** *[pg 4]*

Because it's your mail, addressed to you personally. Yes, it probably is for the entire board's consumption, but it was still addressed to you by name. Your responsibility is to share with the full board whatever the contents may be. Most mail will come from KDLA, which gave up years ago trying to keep up with board presidents' home addresses. (By the way, checks are always sent to the library in the director's name, so delays in opening mail to the president won't delay deposits of funds.)

Any Library Twelve Month Board Agenda

Some important board business should occur on a scheduled basis. By making a written plan for the board year, you can anticipate those important items of business and be prepared for them. Consider the following items and any other business that you know will come before your board in the next twelve months. Then place the items of business under the appropriate month.

Receive Proposed Budget	Review Board Policies	Review Insurance
Vote on a Budget	Review Personnel Policies	Tour Library
Evaluate Director	Review Operational Policies	Visit Branches
Elect New Officers	Review Long-Range Plan	Trustee Nominations to KDLA

July 2001:

August 2001:

September 2001:

October 2001:

November 2001:

December 2001:

January 2002:

February 2002:

March 2002:

April 2002:

May 2002:

June 2002: